

The 2001 Annual

Volume 1 Training

Jossey-Bass
Pfeiffer

677. WHEN SHALL WE MEET AGAIN? ASSESSING INFORMATION IN TEAMS

Goals

- To demonstrate how teams assess information to make a decision.
 - To develop participant awareness of the group's process for evaluating information.
 - To demonstrate the importance of having a process to make a decision.
 - To show the emergence of leadership in a new team.
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Group Size

Any number over five to as many as the room can hold or the number of information cards you have prepared. The activity is especially well-suited for a newly formed team of any type.

Time Required

Thirty to forty-five minutes.

Materials

- A prepared flip chart with the following question written legibly: "Given the information you have received by e-mail (on the index cards), when will your team meet next week (day and time)?"
- Prepared e-mail/index cards. Each index card should have one of the following pieces of information neatly printed:
 - The team agreed that Mondays are a bad time to meet because everyone's just returning from the weekend and preparing for the work week.
 - Mary usually takes the minutes.

- Many people in the office go bowling on Thursday nights.
 - The coffee machine is three doors down from the conference room.
 - The conference room has an oval table with ten chairs around it.
 - John and Kathy always arrive at work by 6:30 a.m.
 - A flip chart and markers are in the conference room.
 - Sally and Roger have to leave work by 4:00 p.m.
 - The team agreed that Fridays are a bad time to meet. Everybody's preparing to leave for the weekend (if they haven't already left).
 - The company has 211 employees.
 - Kristin is the team leader.
 - Treena thinks that team meetings are usually a waste of time.
 - Ken has been looking forward to the team meeting. He has a very important issue he'd like to raise.
 - The overhead projector light bulb is burned out.
 - There isn't a whiteboard in the conference room.
 - The team agreed that the team leader prepares the agenda and leads the meeting.
 - Kristin is going to be out of town on Tuesday and Wednesday.
 - The conference room is booked on Thursday from 8 a.m. to 12 noon.
 - The conference room is booked on Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 12 noon.
- Note:* If the group is exceptionally large, or you want to add to the confusion, you may add your own irrelevant information cards.

Physical Setting

A room large enough to have all the participants within view of one another.

Process

1. Invite the group to participate in a team activity that will give them a glimpse into their group dynamics. Tell the group: "Your team needs to meet for four hours next week. You have been exchanging e-mails to determine the best day and time to meet. Your e-mail exchanges are written on these index cards."

2. Mix up the cards and give at least one card to each team member. Remind them that their task is to answer the question written on the flip chart. Then stand out of the way and watch the team dynamics!
3. As the team attempts to solve the riddle, you may witness some common traps. Write the traps below on a flip chart (out of view of participants) for later discussion:
 - *No Process.* The team just starts shouting out the information they have on the cards, without planning how to handle the task.
 - *Process Loss.* The team ignores someone who has the answer (or something close to it).
 - *Hero Emerges.* One person solves the riddle and declares victory, while making his/her teammates feel left out or stupid.
 - *Poor Communication Skills.* Talking over each other, interrupting, dominating the conversation.
 - *Assumptions.* The team begins to make assumptions about which information is relevant and which is not without any criteria to assess it.
 - *agonizing About the Irrelevant.* Just in case they miss something, the team goes over each piece of information.
 - *Paranoia.* Could it be a trap? Could it be one of those team activities that "get you" in the end? Is there something the facilitator just isn't telling us?
4. Just be patient, allowing about fifteen minutes for the process to evolve. Take notes for the debriefing. Eventually, the team should figure out the need for structure and a process. One person will take the "leadership role," define a process, and lead the team to the logical conclusion. (Fifteen minutes.)
5. The answer is deceptively simple: The team must meet on Thursday from 12 noon until 4 p.m. The team has agreed it cannot meet on Mondays and Fridays. Kristin has to be at the meeting, and she'll be out of town on Tuesday and Wednesday. The conference room is booked on Thursday from 8 a.m. to 12 noon.
6. Stop the group and show them the list of common traps you made on the flip chart. Ask whether they fell into any of these traps and why. Have them discuss ways to avoid these pitfalls in the future and make a list on the flip chart for them to use at their next group meeting. (Ten minutes.)

7. Debrief the activity, using some of the following questions:

- What worked well?
- What could the group have done better?
- How might the team work better together in the future?
- Who emerged as a leader and why? What qualities did this person possess?
- What process might be used the next time the team must assess information? How could you be sure to remember to use the process in the future?

(Ten minutes.)

Submitted by Kristin J. Arnold.

Kristin J. Arnold, CPCM, specializes in facilitating leadership, management, and employee teams, particularly in the areas of strategic planning, process improvement, decision making, and collaborative problem solving. An author, national speaker, and featured columnist in The Daily Press, Ms. Arnold is regarded as an expert in team development. With building extraordinary teams as her signature service, she has provided process facilitation, training, and coaching support to both public- and private-sector initiatives.